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THE FARM FAMILY'S INTEREST IN LAND USE*

By Marjorie E. Luce
State Home Demonstration Leader, Vermont

I feel very much like the second installment of a very poor serial story, since as many of you remember I told you more than I knew about one phase of this subject at the conference last March. However, I suppose I brought it on myself to some extent, since I then stated that we were not ready to discuss the attempt which we were just undertaking to include farm women in the considerations of what we are calling just now in Extension parlance, the "larger" problems. Having had only one meeting at that time, we could give utterance only to our fond hopes, so now I suppose you would like the real "low down" as to how the experience measured up to our expectations.

Since Director Corbett has treated this matter of land-use approach in general terms as it affects the State and society in general, I inferred that I was to bring it down to a more specific application to the ultimate consumer -- the farm family. I will then, try to discuss the matter in two parts: first, the farm family's own interest in land use as differentiated from the interest which the State and society has, and second, the farm family's interest in land use from the point of view of various members of the family, particularly the women and older youth.

As regards the special interest which the farm family has in land use, there seems no argument as to whether or not they have an interest. They are forced to take an interest no matter how much their natural inclination is to put their heads in the sand. The penalties of lack of interest are too great. The extent of their concern with this matter of land use is confined by the extent of their individual awareness and the degree of intelligent interest which they take in affairs in general. Agricultural interests through the ages have been largely determined by the land. The land has always molded the men who seek to gain a living from it. It is a veritable dictator to those who serve it; all children on farms grow up realizing this. But, of late, there seems to have been seeping into everyone's consciousness the realization that more and more forces are coming to play upon the land and make its handling more and more complex. No longer do we hear about the "simple" life; or if we do, we are indeed simple if we believe it. The elements of nature which may be simple, irreducible forces by themselves, have become too much entangled with economics, foreign policies and international relations, governmental action, and social factors.

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The farm family may well feel that they are at the focal point of a whirlwind whose direction may at any moment be entirely shifted by a new blast; it is extremely difficult to know just which way the wind blows. Surely they must admit that the old concept of a free and independent life to be lived upon the land is gone, probably forever. Farm people maintain their power of self-determination only insofar as they conform to the forces which play upon them, just as do other people.

Theoretically, in our country at least, farm people are not tied to the land as strictly as in the old days of serfdom, or even as they are still in some countries where land is a possession which is expected never to leave a family. However, farm families still are tied to the land to some degree. Their training, experience, and inborn interests serve as stakes to keep them tethered to some piece of land, even though it may not always be the same piece. Of course, farm families are interested in the land's use -- in all land, but especially their own -- its productivity, the type of handling required, the particular products with which they are to deal, the special kind of labor they are to be engaged in, and perhaps most of all, the returns which they may expect to get from this labor. All these factors determine the degree of culture, comfort, and satisfaction which the family is going to enjoy. They set the pattern for living and determine the color of existence for the farm family. And since our people are not tied to any particular spot, even though they may be predestined to an agricultural existence, they have a particularly keen interest because the matters of choice as to location and decision as to type of agricultural venture are in their hands, to some degree at least.

The ordinary farm family is interested in the use of land other than that circumscribed by their own fences. Family life nowadays, even on the most remote farm, is closely identified with and colored by, the environment in which it finds itself. If the farm is to border a picnic area, a State or national forest, or a resort of some type, the family living there will experience quite a different life than if they were surrounded by other farms of their own type.

The ordinary farm family wants to be a part of a community which attracts, because of the promise of economic security, a group of families similar in interests and ambitions. They have a wholesome interest in their neighbors, too, knowing that they will share a common lot, socially. There must be a tax list which will provide the wherewithal for common advantages of education, social opportunity, health, and governmental protection. There must therefore be enough land with a degree of productivity, and sufficiently favorable market facilities to assure a prosperous community.

Farm families are interested in looking into the future, too -- the immediate future which concerns next month's milk check and next season's crops and also the middle-distant and far-distant future. The old idea of becoming "attached" to a piece of land -- in both the emotional and the physical sense -- is still very strong in farm people. They would like to

consider the span of time during which they may expect to maintain their homes -- whether they are to settle down briefly as the small-town lumber kings did during the period of exploitation, or whether they may reasonably expect that at least a generation in the existence of the family may be spent here.

Many families have been puzzled by the apparent contradiction that they notice in the history of some of the land with which they are familiar. They see the land now abandoned, but with the remnants of buildings which were once evidence of great prosperity. They hear tales of the large families who were brought up on those farms, and the size of the dairy and the amount of the crops that these fields once supported. And so they realize, even the women and children, that land use is a more complicated matter than simply testing the soil and deciding what will grow upon it. They eagerly welcome any help in studying the economic and sociological conditions which enter so largely into a determination of land use. They are anxious to conform, if by so doing they may avoid the penalty of economic annihilation, or the nerve-racked existence which we call "just hanging on."

Now, as to the second question -- the interest of all the members of the farm family in land use. We may answer that they are interested, they are forced to be interested, but how conscious they are of this interest may be the question. The very history of farm life, its relative isolation and self-sufficiency, and the close connection between the activities in the farm home and on the land give us the answer. Every member of the farm family is definitely interested in all the activities. How articulate that interest becomes is determined only by the opportunity that we give it for expression. If we admit that all members of the family naturally have an interest in any matter which so vitally concerns them as land use, we will see evidences of that interest on every side. I am reminded here of an answer which Dorothy Canfield Fisher once made to the question of how to deal with children. She said that the secret was to treat them as human beings. I think that all members of the farm family should be treated in this way, with the expectation that they are of course interested in all matters which concern their family life. And I am fortified in this belief by the testimonials which I have from the women who took part in our Women's Agricultural Policy Committees last year and who are this year carrying on jointly with the men and older youth in the county committees.

These women discussed problems of land use from the point of view of the State, the county, the community, and finally the individual farm family. One of them writes, "I have gained a better realization of those general agricultural conditions in the State and county which limit and condition the family living to be obtained from one's own individual farm." Another gained, as she says, a "comprehensive view of our present farm problems; and still another "the history of the past changes in agriculture and reasons for the present change, a better understanding of conditions in our neighboring communities and suggestions for betterment." One reports "a new light on problems in other States," and still another, "what can be done to correct existing conditions, even if they do not happen to be a

problem in our own county." It is quite a lot for a Vermonter to be interested in the rest of the world.

After the meetings were over last year we asked the county groups to appoint subcommittees of three to five women who would meet to make lists of what they thought were the most vital problems facing Vermont farm families. I have here the list as summarized for the State from the findings of all the county groups. It is an amazing collection of problems and I am afraid a little different from the usual list of offerings of our home demonstration programs; the women are, you see, beginning to drag us. I hope we can soon regain our footing and reassume our position of leadership.

I suppose the real test of their interest, however, is whether or not any action comes as a result. That is the question to be discussed tomorrow morning.

The events of these last few years have shaken many people out of their indifference to this matter of land use; many have had to pay the penalty, often the extreme penalty, of their failure to read the handwriting on the wall. Perhaps they need help with this handwriting, it may be merely hieroglyphics made up of economic and sociological symbols which need deciphering and interpretation. If so, therein lies our reason, the Extension Service's reason; for being perhaps.

What is the next step, how successful are we going to be in getting the facts before the people and helping them to see the relationship between their local and personal situation and larger situations? How may we use our experience of working with people to give them intelligent guidance in interpreting these facts, and help them to plan action which they decide will be helpful?

Are we going to fall into the trap of being overanxious -- will we be tempted to set the stage and direct them too much? Perhaps we have come to the point where we need to decide which plan we shall follow -- that which has been our old standby of campaigns and slogans, which stampeded people into action (which, to be sure, we often made them think was their own idea) or, shall we find some more simple and direct method of complete understanding and agreement between all concerned? If we agree that constructive thinking on the part of all the people is fundamental to their constructive action, how are we to go about encouraging that type of thinking?

We extension people must acknowledge the challenge which is made to us in the attitude of the farm people toward a consideration of their larger problems. We must make it possible for them to work on these larger problems and not expect to go on with the same old program of teaching skills or supplying remedies. How successfully we do this will prove how well equipped we are for the responsibility which is ours.

But the responsibility is not ours alone. Our county boards and our clientele must all share, I am sure, these tasks. They are already eager to consider these larger problems. I judge since the people in the Washington office ask extension leadership in carrying out the Mt. Weather agreement that they are prepared for the reorganization of our work, a different type of program of work, a different type of annual report which this educational job will require, relief from many of the extra tasks which fall to us in increasing numbers each year, and perhaps even additional staff with special training for this type of work. I'm sure everyone understands that lack of time is the one big obstacle we have to face. There is no lack of agreement as to whether or not this attack on the land-use problem is the thing which we should be doing.

PROBLEMS WHICH CONCERN VERMONT RURAL PEOPLE

The following is a summary of the reports made by the subcommittees of the Women's Agricultural Policy Committees. After the three general meetings had been held in each county, these committees met for the purpose of determining what were the problems which should be considered during the next few years.

A. ECONOMIC WELFARE

More money

- *(12) Study new enterprises
- (10) Understand effect of price level
- (11) Study marketing situation
- (10) Investigate cooperative buying and selling

B. WISE USE OF RESOURCES

- (11) Land -- Study soil types and their use

Money

- (11) Study spending practices for home and family needs
- (10) Study farm costs
- (8) Information on buying for home and family
- (5) Information on buying farm supplies
- (2) Study of credit sources

- (10) Time -- Study use of time

C. IMPROVEMENT OF SOCIAL CONDITIONS

- (4) Reach more people who need help
- (5) Assist older-young people
 - (3) Problems concerned with earning a living
 - (1) " " " establishing homes
 - (3) Better understanding between adults and adolescents

D. PROBLEMS CONCERNED WITH PUBLIC SERVICES, WELFARE, ETC.

- (5) Taxation -- Study of local and State tax situation
- (2) Unemployment -- Work for young people particularly
- (2) Relief and welfare agencies -- Study of operations and effectiveness
- (1) Better roads program

* The figures indicate the number of counties in which this problem was mentioned. No attempt was made to record on this chart all the phases of the major problem which were discussed in each county.

E. TAKING CARE OF FAMILIES

(11) Housing

- (8) Care of the house
- (5) Furnishings -- selection, care, and arrangement
- (5) Equipment (especially kitchens)
- (5) Repairs and rebuilding, etc.
- (4) Landscaping home grounds

(9) Health -- Safeguarding family health

(13) Clothing

Providing healthful and appropriate clothing for the family

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| (10) Selection | (6) Care of clothing |
| (6) Construction | (3) Personal care |

(12) Food

Providing adequate and healthful food for the family

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| Home production of food | Meal planning |
| Food preservation | Food buying |
| Food preparation and serving | Establishing good food habits |

(8) Family Relationships

- (5) Planning use of money by whole group
- (6) Sharing of responsibility within group

(9) Child care and training

Training for citizenship
Character development

(7) Social life -- Providing wholesome activities for the family

F. COMMUNITY PROBLEMS

(13) Offering educational advantages for all people

Study of local school system
Opportunities for adult education (libraries, organizations, study groups, etc.)

Nursery schools or kindergartens

Vocational training opportunity

- (3) Opportunities for religious observance
- (2) Public protection -- Policing and law enforcement
- (12) Recreational facilities and leadership

Study of community recreation

(14) Community health agencies

Opportunity for health education
Study of group-hospitalization plans
Use of health agencies which might be available
Observance of quarantine laws, etc.
Public sanitation

(18) Need for more leadership training